American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier. By Patrick Griffin. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007. Introduction, epilogue, illustrations, map, notes, acknowledgments, index. Pp. 368. $30.)

The American West has often been perceived as a place of new beginnings, where individuals seeking to escape an unsatisfying life could reinvent themselves. In this important new book Patrick Griffin presents the West as a place where American society as a whole reinvented itself. The West was historically fluid, both as place and as concept, as the frontier swept steadily across the continent. Griffin focuses on the period between 1763 and 1795 when it was located in the Ohio River Valley. That frontier region was violently-contested: by France and Britain, by whites and Native Americans, by settlers and speculators, by colonies (and later states), and by the British government and American rebels. Griffin imagines that seething cauldron as a lens through which to examine the nature of frontier, revolution, sovereignty, and the eventual emergence of a more populist and democratic political system.

American Leviathan begins with a description of the many and varied contestants who competed for the rich lands and resources of the Ohio River Valley. Fighting among those adversaries, especially between Native Americans and white land speculators and settlers, grew so savage that the British government despaired of governing them. In 1763 it tried to relinquish responsibility for the territory by promulgating the Proclamation Line of 1763, which naively and unsuccessfully forbade white settlement west of the crest of the Appalachians.

Griffin draws upon Thomas Hobbes's concept of the state of nature, the "war of all against all," in construing the consequences of the Proclamation. As Hobbes would have predicted, Britain's abdication of authority over the region led to more violence, not less. One far-reaching result was a devastating change in the nature of white-Indian relations. Whites for the most part had accepted the differences between the two peoples as culturally defined. Consequently whites, although firmly convinced that Indians were inferior, saw them nevertheless as capable of redemption through a "civilizing" process of reeducation. But as Indian brutality grew more savage and horrific--an escalation that was matched by whites--they began to think of Indians as innately different. Because this new characterization was racist, instead of cultural, it condemned Indians to an irredeemable state of savagery. Furthermore, it meant that the intensifying hatred of whites towards Indians could only be assuaged through genocide or removal. This change in perception sealed the fate of Indians east of the Mississippi.

The steady rise of frontier violence also transformed white attitudes towards the role of the state. Opportunists have often found advantage in chaos, and speculators and settlers initially benefited from Britain's renunciation of sovereignty over the Ohio territory. Elite land speculators staked out enormous claims, and poor settlers squatted, undisturbed by legal niceties (but creating an impenetrable tangle of overlapping claims to be dealt with when government later returned). However, as the violence escalated, settlers and speculators alike experienced the brutal reality of Hobbes's state of nature. It soon persuaded them that a sovereign state, a "Leviathan" powerful enough to impose order by force, was in fact necessary to ensure their enjoyment of the fruits of their exploitation of the frontier. Increasingly they demanded protection from the various levels of government--first colonial and royal and, and subsequently state and federal.

Sometimes those governments promised troops and militia forces that never materialized; when they did appear, they often proved to be too few in number and woefully inadequate. More often Western appeals for protection fell upon deaf ears back east. Eventually, whites whose interests lay in the West concluded that if they were to be protected from the Indians and their French and later British allies, they would have to protect themselves. Extremists among them insisted that if existing states could or would not impose order, then a new Leviathan must be created to pacify the frontier. The Whiskey Rebellion that broke out in western Pennsylvania in 1794 and spread throughout the trans-Appalachian West was the most serious manifestation of that chain of thought.

Finally, the frontier experience in the Ohio territory enlarged the role that common people played in shaping American society. Their steady demands for government protection against Indians reflected a growing insistence that the state be responsive to their needs. The resulting empowerment of the common people, Griffin claims, led to a more democratic political culture that changed the structure of politics in the nation as a whole, reflected in the evolution of voting rights. Growing demands by Westerners that the state be more accountable to common people led to a broadening of the suffrage. As new states were carved out of the Ohio River Valley region they were admitted with manhood suffrage, a practice that was soon adopted by the original thirteen states. Wealthy and powerful elites in America were still privileged, but within the framework of a political structure that was becoming more democratic. Frontier violence and chaos had led to a revision in attitudes about the need for and the nature of sovereignty.

American Leviathan is an important and stimulating book about the influence of the early frontier on America's political development. It explores that development not from the perspective of elites but rather from the bottom up. It argues that the common people played roles that were not simply reactive to the decisions and actions of elites, but that they possessed and exercised agency themselves. *American Leviathan*, in conjunction with Griffin's earlier book on the role of Scotch-Irish immigrants in the formation of America, whose lowly status is reflected in his title *The People with No Name*, significantly adds to our understanding of populist culture. It offers students of early America new perspectives on its political development.

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